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ABSTRACT

This needs assessment instrument contains indicators of recommended practice for serving infants and toddlers with disabilities in inclusive natural settings. It is designed to be used by early intervention personnel, child care providers, early childhood teachers, early Head Start providers, and others who wish to identify their needs for training, particularly that which is related to collaboration in natural settings. The 72 benchmark indicators of recommended practice were developed using a national validation process, similar to the process used by the Council of Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood for their publication "DEC Recommended Practices in Early Childhood Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, 2000" (ED 451 662). (Author/SG)

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Benchmarks of Recommended Practice

Needs Assessment for Successful Inclusion of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Natural Settings

- Collaborative Practices
- Environmental Strategies
- Learning Strategies
- Family-Centered Practices
- Administrative Practices

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Adrienne Frank, MS, OTR, Editor
Child Development Resources

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Forward

This publication was developed by **Benchmarks: Inclusion of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Natural Settings Through Training in Collaborative Consultation**, a project of Child Development Resources (CDR). CDR is a private, nonprofit agency that provides services for young children and their families and offers training and technical assistance to the professionals who serve them.

Benchmarks is a four-year (1999-2003) model demonstration project funded by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Accomplishments of the project include development of the indicators of recommended practice; design of a model of training and curriculum; and field-testing with families, early intervention providers, and caregivers in natural environments.

For more information about Benchmarks or other training opportunities or products offered by CDR, please contact:

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Benchmarks of Recommended Practice: Needs Assessment for Successful Inclusion of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Natural Settings

Adrienne Frank, MS, OTR, Editor

Benchmarks of Recommended Practice is a needs assessment instrument containing indicators of recommended practice for serving infants and toddlers with disabilities in inclusive natural settings. It is designed to be used by early intervention personnel, child care providers, early childhood teachers, Early Head Start providers, and others who wish to identify their needs for training particularly related to collaboration in natural settings.

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Mary McLean, a consultant to the project, provided invaluable leadership in convening the focus group and guiding staff through the validation process for the Benchmarks Indicators of Recommended Practice. Dr. McLean is one of the coauthors of the Division of Early Childhood publication ***DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, 2000.***

The ***Benchmarks of Recommended Practice*** indicators were developed by a national focus group consisting of 24 representatives of families and early intervention, child care, and Early Head Start providers and administrators. Focus group members also represented national early childhood and early intervention organizations and higher education.

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The Validation Process

The Benchmarks indicators of recommended practice were developed using a national validation process. The Benchmarks process was similar to the process used by the Division of Early Childhood for their publication ***DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, 2000.***

The 72 indicators of recommended practice were drafted by national experts who met as a focus group at the Division of Early Childhood Conference (December, 1999). Draft statements were compared with research and recommended practice literature and edited.

A validation survey was distributed nationally and completed by 247 professionals and families. Of those completing the survey, 38% described themselves as early childhood special educators, 31% as family members of individuals with disabilities, 25% as early intervention providers, 21% as administrators, and 15% as early childhood teachers or providers. A number of respondents named multiple roles.

The indicators of recommended practice had very high agreement ratings. Across all items, 94% strongly agreed or agreed that each item was an indicator of recommended practice. Respondents were asked to: *Rate the extent to which you agree that each item is an indicator of recommended practice for inclusion of infants and toddlers in natural settings (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree).* On only 11 items did respondents (one respondent each) indicate that they strongly disagreed.

Use of the Indicators of Recommended Practice

The purpose of ***Benchmarks of Recommended Practice*** is to help practitioners identify quality services and programs and to guide the design of day-to-day practice for infants and toddlers with disabilities in natural settings. Improved child outcomes are linked to quality practices, services, and programs (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994; Burchinal, Lee, & Ramey, 1989; Buysse & Bailey, 1993). The indicators of recommended practice can become quality standards, through which child and program outcomes are measured.

Benchmarks Curriculum and Training

The Benchmarks indicators of recommended practice were used to develop the Benchmarks curriculum for training family members, early intervention providers, and infant/toddler caregivers and early childhood teachers. Benchmarks' training provides the prerequisite knowledge and skills in collaborative consultation to promote the successful inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities in natural settings.

Benchmarks curricular materials are used in three levels of Benchmarks training: an introductory seminar, workshops, and practical application.

- The **introductory seminar** is an overview of inclusion, related laws, collaborative consultation, and the roles of families, providers, and caregivers.
- **Workshops** promote knowledge and skills in the areas of family partnerships, collaborative consultation, learning strategies, accessible and engaging settings, and administrative practices.
- During **practical application**, providers, families, and caregivers develop collaborative learning plans and practice collaboration strategies using curricular materials.

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The Indicators as a Needs Assessment

Benchmarks of Recommended Practice is designed to help early intervention providers, families, child care providers, early childhood teachers, Early Head Start providers, and others identify needs for information, resources, or skills for serving infants and toddlers with disabilities in natural inclusive settings.

The needs assessment can be completed by an individual or a small group. Small groups of families, providers, and caregivers can work together to review the indicators and set priorities for training. The indicators foster discussion and stimulate learning among the adults caring for young children with disabilities.

The instrument is divided into five areas:

- ***Collaborative Practices*** - Practices, roles, and skills of family members, child care providers, and early intervention personnel serving young children in natural settings.
- ***Environmental Strategies*** - Strategies used in caregiving and other natural settings to promote learning and engage children.
- ***Learning Strategies*** - Caregiving strategies that enhance infants' and toddlers' individual and group experiences in natural settings.
- ***Family-Centered Practices*** - Ideas and strategies related to working with families in inclusive, natural settings.
- ***Administrative Practices*** - Resources and supports that child care, early childhood, and early intervention administrators use to promote inclusion.

Instructions for Completing the Instrument

The Benchmarks indicators will help you to set priorities for learning.

- Look through the five practice areas on the next few pages and decide what you will complete. You may choose to complete the entire instrument or selected parts.

  Rate the items:

  Do Not Need = 0
  Need A Little = 1
  Need Some = 2
  Need A Lot = 3

- Review the indicators (e.g., C1, A2, etc.) that you identified as needs and use the summary form, following the five practice areas, to help you to set your priorities for learning.

- Write additional comments about other ideas for learning or suggested methods for learning (e.g., workshops, books, videos, etc.).

Collaborative Practices *Practices, roles, and skills of family members, child care providers, and early intervention personnel serving children in natural environments should include:*		Do Not Need	Need A Little	Need Some	Need A Lot
C1	Using a common, simple language and explaining jargon	0	1	2	3
C2	Identifying the purpose of collaboration and clearly communicating roles and responsibilities	0	1	2	3
C3	Sharing all relevant observations, information, and resources with appropriate team members	0	1	2	3
C4	Developing strategies for communication and communicating on a frequent, continuing basis	0	1	2	3
C5	Sharing skills, talents, and resources with one another	0	1	2	3
C6	Trying out new roles or interventions traditionally used by a specific discipline (crossing boundaries)	0	1	2	3
C7	Being responsive to new ideas, differing viewpoints, and open to change	0	1	2	3
C8	Actively participating in the intervention process, as appropriate (i.e. assessment, planning, implementation, and transition)	0	1	2	3
C9	Helping to determine intervention strategies and services based on the child's individual needs and family priorities (i.e., Individualized Family Service Plan)	0	1	2	3
C10	Monitoring child development and outcome achievement	0	1	2	3
C11	Working together to ensure that natural settings and community resources are accessible to the child and family	0	1	2	3
C12	Developing a plan for working together, and implementing and evaluating results	0	1	2	3
C13	Contributing constructively to team problem solving	0	1	2	3
C14	Using an agreed-upon process for continuous improvement and self-reflection	0	1	2	3
C15	Using an agreed-upon process for conflict resolution	0	1	2	3
C16	Collaborating across disciplines and settings to plan, use, and evaluate complex or technological intervention	0	1	2	3
C17	Collaborating/consulting with each other to integrate specialized interventions and services into daily routines and natural settings	0	1	2	3

Environmental Strategies *Strategies used in caregiving and other natural settings to promote learning and engage children with disabilities should include:*		Do Not Need	Need A Little	Need Some	Need A Lot
E1	Creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment (e.g., procedures for medications, universal precautions, emergency response, toys, equipment)	0	1	2	3
E2	Making settings comfortable, enjoyable, and welcoming for the child (e.g., secure seating, noise level, lighting, temperature)	0	1	2	3
E3	Using a variety of developmentally and age-appropriate materials and activity areas (including outside spaces) to include children in varied learning experiences	0	1	2	3
E4	Using readily available and easily accessible materials to facilitate child choice and development	0	1	2	3
E5	Providing the child with opportunities to explore, manipulate, combine, and transform chosen material	0	1	2	3
E6	Preparing and creating language-rich social settings and activities	0	1	2	3
E7	Maintaining flexible arrangement and/or rearrangement of space for a variety of activities and group sizes	0	1	2	3

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Learning Strategies *Caregiving strategies that enhance the infants' and toddlers' individual and group experiences in natural settings should include:*		Do Not Need	Need A Little	Need Some	Need A lot
L1	Ensuring that the child's basic health needs are met (e.g., feeding/nutrition, hygiene, rest, illness prevention)	0	1	2	3
L2	Supporting the child's attachment/trust relationship to a primary caregiver to ensure a sense of security and continuity of care	0	1	2	3
L3	Responding rapidly and appropriately to distress	0	1	2	3
L4	Giving the child clear messages and positive guidance about expectations for behavior	0	1	2	3
L5	Knowing and using strategies that are consistent with developmentally appropriate practice and that are responsive, sensitive caregiving in order to address challenging behaviors	0	1	2	3
L6	Observing and learning about the child's individual strengths and needs in the home and other familiar contexts (i.e., assessment)	0	1	2	3
L7	Designing and using learning activities that respond to children's cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity	0	1	2	3
L8	Letting the child set the pace for the adult interaction (e.g., watch and listen to the child, wait for a response)	0	1	2	3
L9	Planning and supporting interaction among children	0	1	2	3
L10	Helping the child to be active/engaged with materials, activities, and other appropriate learning experiences	0	1	2	3
L11	Providing choices of materials and activities that are stimulating, creative, developmentally and age-appropriate, and preferred by the child	0	1	2	3
L12	Fostering interactions that enhance learning and increase independence	0	1	2	3
L13	Using a variety of activities that promote use of senses, curiosity, exploration, and learning across all developmental areas (i.e., motor, cognitive, language, self-help, social/emotional)	0	1	2	3
L14	Encouraging the child's use of language and communication of needs, feelings, and ideas	0	1	2	3
L15	Identifying and using intervention strategies that take advantage of learning opportunities in daily caregiving routines	0	1	2	3
L16	Providing practice in both varied and predictable daily routines	0	1	2	3
L17	Using routines that are interactive, functional, and positive for children in the context of their environment	0	1	2	3
L18	Adjusting or modifying materials or equipment or using assistive technology to help the child engage with others and enhancing learning only as necessary	0	1	2	3

Family-Centered Practices *Ideas and practices related to working with families in inclusive, natural settings should include:*		Do Not Need	Need A Little	Need Some	Need A Lot
F1	Seeking to understand and respect family values, culture, and privacy	0	1	2	3
F2	Making interactions and settings comfortable, enjoyable, and welcoming for the family	0	1	2	3
F3	Communicating all relevant information to the family using a variety of strategies (e.g., informal contacts, notes, meetings, newsletters)	0	1	2	3
F4	Identifying and using a primary contact person for the family	0	1	2	3
F5	Supporting the family as primary decision makers in caregiving and intervention (i.e., where, when, and who)	0	1	2	3
F6	Supporting the family in identifying their priorities for their child and family	0	1	2	3
F7	Developing and using plans (e.g., Individualized Family Service Plan) that are based on family priorities for outcomes	0	1	2	3
F8	Ensuring that the family is informed of rights and procedural safeguards	0	1	2	3
F9	Offering and supporting the family choices for participation (e.g., in class, home visits, parent-to-parent, family nights)	0	1	2	3
F10	Facilitating the family's involvement in all relevant activities (e.g., in typical center activities, early intervention services, administrative decision making)	0	1	2	3
F11	Providing flexible options that encourage family participation (e.g., flexible hours)	0	1	2	3
F12	Supporting the family as a partner in their child's development or learning	0	1	2	3
F13	Helping family members learn about their child, caregiving, and interventions according to their expressed needs	0	1	2	3
F14	Make information, resources, and training available to each family (e.g., related to rights, advocacy, inclusion practices, disabilities)	0	1	2	3

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Administrative Practices *Resources and supports that child care, early childhood, and early intervention administrators use to promote inclusion should include:*		Do Not Need	Need A Little	Need Some	Need A Lot
A1	Being knowledgeable about and explaining language/jargon used across settings and programs and encouraging the use of a common, simple language	0	1	2	3
A2	Continually seeking high standards of child care (e.g., using developmentally appropriate practice, seeking accreditation)	0	1	2	3
A3	Developing and using policies and procedures to support inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities with typically developing peers	0	1	2	3
A4	Having knowledge about and thinking critically about state, federal, and local regulations across settings/systems (e.g., ADA, child care regulations)	0	1	2	3
A5	Advocating for change (i.e., reducing barriers) in regulation and/or policy	0	1	2	3
A6	Collecting and using evaluation data to improve programs or services	0	1	2	3
A7	Addressing potential and perceived business and/or financial barriers (e.g., staff retention, adult-child ratio, staff diversity)	0	1	2	3
A8	Identifying and recruiting children with disabilities in need of early intervention services and placement in inclusive settings	0	1	2	3
A9	Supporting facility accommodations for individual needs of the child with disabilities (e.g., use of a wagon for mobility)	0	1	2	3
A10	Using/encouraging nontraditional methods to support staff for inclusion (e.g., integrating therapies)	0	1	2	3
A11	Developing and using strategies that support participation of caregivers in early intervention teamwork (e.g., substitutes, flexible scheduling, comp time for extended hours)	0	1	2	3
A12	Creating opportunities and supporting continuous learning (i.e., for administration, caregivers, providers, and families)	0	1	2	3
A13	Observing staff and providing feedback based on individual professional development needs and desires	0	1	2	3
A14	Being aware of and knowing how to use community resources	0	1	2	3
A15	Fostering collaborative relationships among community resources	0	1	2	3
A16	Ensuring smooth transitions from one setting to another	0	1	2	3

Needs Assessment Summary Form

Name(s) _____ Date _____

✓ Check any or all of the practice areas in which you would like to gain information, skills, or resources.
○ Circle the numbers for the indicators that you feel are your highest priority.

Collaborative Practices	Environmental Strategies	Learning Strategies	Family-Centered Practices	Administrative Practices
☐ *I/we would like training in . . .*	☐ *I/we would like training in . . .*	☐ *I/we would like training in . . .*	☐ *I/we would like training in . . .*	☐ *I/we would like training in . . .*
Practices, roles, and skills for family members, child care providers, and early intervention personnel serving children in natural environments, *especially:*	Strategies used in caregiving and other natural settings to promote learning and engage children with disabilities, *especially:*	Caregiving strategies that enhance infants' and toddlers' individual and group experiences in natural settings, *especially:*	Ideas and practices related to working with families in inclusive, natural settings, *especially:*	Resources and supports that child care, early childhood, and early intervention administrators use to promote inclusion, *especially:*
C1 C7 C13	E1 E5	L1 L7 L13	F1 F8	A1 A9
C2 C8 C14	E2 E6	L2 L8 L14	F2 F9	A2 A10
C3 C9 C15	E3 E7	L3 L9 L15	F3 F10	A3 A11
C4 C10 C16	E4	L4 L10 L16	F4 F11	A4 A12
C5 C11 C17		L5 L11 L17	F5 F12	A5 A13
C6 C12		L6 L12 L18	F6 F13	A6 A14
			F7 F14	A7 A15
				A8 A16

Additional Comments:

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Individualized Learning Plan

When you have completed the needs assessment instrument, use the **Individualized Learning Plan** to write down your learning goals.

Here are a few sample goals:

- *To communicate better with the child's family about the child's daily routine.*
- *To learn about how to keep the child active and engaged so that he or she can learn more.*

Write down activities or strategies you will use to accomplish your goals. Think about how you would like to learn. You may want to read books and written materials, watch videos, attend a workshop, plan training for your program, and/or get practical help.

Here are a few examples of activities or strategies:

- *Use a communication log that the family can read each day.*
- *Discuss your child's daily routine at home or in a child care classroom.*
- *Watch a child in play and think about how to increase the child's enjoyment.*

Write down the people you want to help you.

Set a time frame. What is your target date for completing your goal?

Review your plan on a regular basis. Keep written notes about how well you are doing or write down new strategies you want to use to continue your learning.

Use the attached form to record your learning plan.

Individualized Learning Plan

Name(s) _____ Date _____

Learning Goal My priorities for learning	**Learning Options** How do I want to learn it?	**Who** Who will help me?	**Time Frame** When will I complete my goal?	**Comments** How well am I doing?

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